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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUNICH 000328

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S/SRAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2019

TAGS: PGOV EUN GM AF

SUBJECT: GERMANY/AFGHANISTAN: IS THE CSU THE WEAKEST LINK
IN THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY?

REF: A. BERLIN 1601

¶B. MUNICH 324

Classified By: Consul General Conrad Tribble for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Support within Chancellor Merkel's partner Christian Social Union (CSU) for sending more German troops to Afghanistan is not a sure thing. CSU chief and Bavarian Minister President Seehofer, rattled German policy makers nationwide when he told Bild on December 7 that he had "little sympathy" for increasing the number of German soldiers sent to Afghanistan and that "someone would have to convince him of a clear alternative" and "any further German engagement had to be linked to a clear exit strategy." CSU insiders privately regretted Seehofer's remarks, but the CSU General Secretary told us that it reflected realistic thinking. Edmund Stoiber (ex-CSU chairman and ex-Minister President) acknowledged December 10 that the CSU was not automatically a firm U.S. ally on this question but said he expected all federal coalition parties to "live up to their responsibility" and take the right decision following the January 28 Afghanistan conference. However, if he is wrong and there are significant defectors in either the CSU or the FDP, it will be difficult for even supportive SPD and Green parliamentarians to vote in favor of the revised mandate.
End Summary.

SEEHOFER MIGHT ECHO POPULAR CONCERNs

¶2. (C) Echoing concerns expressed privately by some Consulate contacts, many commentators reacted badly to the December 7 timing of Seehofer's skeptical Afghanistan remarks. They accused him of populist posturing while Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, also CSU, was under intense political pressure for the Kunduz tanker bombing, Ambassador Holbrooke was in Germany to receive the Augsburg University Peace Prize, and President Obama was heading to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. However, others acknowledged that Seehofer reflected "proper concerns" and that Germany "needed to deliberate as carefully as the U.S. had done before committing new troops." State Chancellery and Ministry officials, including the State Secretary for Federal and European Issues, told the Consul

General in a private meeting on December 8 they were "embarrassed by Seehofer's remarks" and suggested he had reacted "like a populist" to recent opinion polls that showed 69 percent of Germans opposed sending more German soldiers to Afghanistan. (NOTE: Another recent poll reported that 69 percent favored immediate withdrawal.) A CSU contact called us that same morning from party headquarters to express his frustration over Seehofer who had "once again not consulted anybody before giving his two cents." In contrast to this, CSU Secretary General Alexander Dobrindt told CG Tribble on December 8 that Seehofer's statement was by no means new but reflected "common CSU thinking." Seehofer had "said this many times before," he insisted, without producing proof.

AFGHAN ENTANGLEMENTS SPOOK THE CSU

¶3. (C) The CSU and Bavaria have a well-documented aversion to sensitive engagements in Afghanistan. The CSU has refused to accept any of the 17 Uighurs to be released from Guantanamo, even though Munich is home to an estimated 500 Uighurs, the largest Uigher community in Germany. Bavaria resisted for over a year all entreaties to send police trainers to Afghanistan; the first Bavarian police trainers just left in November after a change of heart by the Interior Minister. CSU Bundestag deputy Peter Gauweiler, together with his CDU colleague Willy Wimmer, appealed to the Federal Constitutional Court in March 2007 to rule against German Tornado reconnaissance aircraft "assisting the U.S. in a mission in Afghanistan that was violating international law." In October 2008, Gauweiler again voted against German ISAF

MUNICH 00000328 002 OF 002

engagement. While Gauweiler is generally seen as an outsider within the CSU party caucus, he may have some secret followers. Another CSU Bundestag deputy, Thomas Silberhorn, said in October that the debate on Afghanistan "should not be limited to discussing more and more foreign soldiers but rather appealing on Afghanistan's own responsibility."

CHANCELLOR NEEDS TO WORK HARDER TO CONVINCE THE PUBLIC

¶4. (C) On December 10, Ambassador Murphy called on Edmund Stoiber, Bavarian Minister President from 1993 to 2007 and CSU party chairman from 1999 to 2007. Stoiber praised the new U.S. Administration and President Obama's "courageous and honest" speeches in West Point and Oslo. He reminded the Ambassador how German engagement in and responsibility for two world wars had "left marks of deep trauma on the German people." The largest demonstrations ever, he recalled, occurred in the fifties when over one million Germans protested German rearmament. The decision to support the NATO two-track decision in the early 1990's even led to the resignation of Helmut Schmidt, one of Germany's most popular chancellors. Stoiber said he did not expect any new insights from the January 28 London Afghanistan conference, but he expressed the hope that all parties of the federal government coalition would live up to their responsibilities. In order to get broad CSU support, the leadership had to develop a realistic exit strategy as President Obama had showed the way with his 2011 target for the United States. Stoiber said he had much confidence in Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU) who was politically well-connected, an expert on foreign policy, and sensitive for what had to be done. However, he called on Chancellor Merkel to start a "public relations initiative" aimed at explaining to the German public why these operations were so vital for German security interests. At the same time, Stoiber predicted the SPD and Greens would "return to their anti-war propaganda." Leaders like Gerhard Schroeder and Joschka Fischer had left the political scene, and ex-Foreign Minister Steinmeier was about to get marginalized in the new SPD.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) At the Consulate in Munich, we heard unprompted, mostly negative, reactions from CSU leadership and working level operatives around Seehofer to his skeptical remarks concerning Germany's Afghanistan troop levels. However, it is clear that the CSU is on the fence and remains to be convinced about the need or wisdom of sending additional troops, especially combat troops as opposed to troops sent to train the Afghan National Army or to provide force protection for police mentoring teams. He may be accurately reflecting the opinion of a skeptical German public that "wants to take its time, just like the United States' President did." Embassy Berlin observes that unanimous or near unanimous support from the CSU is critical to Chancellor Merkel's goal of obtaining a broad majority in the Bundestag for a revised ISAF mandate after the London Conference. If there are significant defectors in either the CSU or the FDP, where there is also significant skepticism about a troop increase, it will be difficult for even supportive SPD and Green parliamentarians to vote in favor of the revised mandate.

¶6. (U) ConGen Munich and Embassy Berlin coordinated this cable.
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